



SOLAR FARMS (POWER STATIONS)

1. CPRE supports alternative, renewable power sources but believes that they need to be carefully located to achieve minimal impact on the environment and on our future wellbeing
2. We recognise that solar power has an important role as part of the energy mix and we encourage its application in appropriate situations, such as roof tops as now encouraged by government in its proposals to direct subsidies towards smaller installations.
3. We are extremely concerned at the prospect of substantial numbers of so-called Solar Farms (large areas of ground mounted panels) in rural areas. Applications for planning permission are increasing and many of these applications are on Grade 3 or better agricultural land, despite the trade association guidelines recommending that this is inappropriate. Kent contains a very large proportion of the nation's Grade 1 and Grade 2 agricultural land and almost all of the remaining land is Grade 3. The fact that higher grade land is more abundant in Kent should not be used to justify its use for solar power generation.
4. Ground mounted solar panels are an inefficient use of valuable land since as little as 30% may be used for panels while the remainder is, in effect, rendered almost useless for farming except possibly for minor grazing.
5. The same power output can be achieved by installing panels on the roofs of most of the houses it is designed to serve. For example, one recent application for a 9.23 Mw installation was designed to serve 2668 houses. However, if each of those houses had just a 4kw installation (the normal size) the output would be 10.67Mw – greater than the solar farm and without the environmental damage or loss to farming.
6. We recognise the attractiveness to the landowner of an apparently secure income with little outlay and without the risks associated with farming. However, this cannot be good for the country as widespread solar farms will make large areas of beautiful countryside inaccessible and unsightly.
7. Increasingly, land will be needed for food production and we do not believe that large solar farms will be maintained as agricultural land, as claimed in some applications. Thus we have severe reservations about its return to agriculture after the normal 25 year permitted period.
8. Individual applications are made to differing local authorities who lack an overview of the totality of these developments. This means that while a single application may appear acceptable, the overall effect of multiple installations could result in excessive conversion of land to non-farming use and irreparable damage to landscapes.
9. We urge that

(i) landowners consider very carefully the long term effect on our countryside and resist the inflated claims made by the increasing number of companies claiming to offer substantial rewards for little risk.

(ii) the installation of roof mounted solar panels is the preferred option and planning applications for these are dealt with swiftly, unless heritage or conservation reasons make it inappropriate. New build houses should be fitted with solar panels as standard.

(iii) a central register is established so that local authorities can be aware of the totality of the applications before arriving at an individual decision.

(iv) any application on grade 3a or better agricultural land is automatically rejected.

(v) conditions are put in place and enforced to ensure that, after the permitted period, the land will be returned to agriculture.

The Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

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